

Lyle Ashton Harris
Our first and last love

05.19.24 – 09.22.24

Accessible exhibition wall text and labels

QUEENS MUSEUM

Lyle Ashton Harris

Our first and last love

Lyle Ashton Harris: Our first and last love charts new connections across the artistic practice of Lyle Ashton Harris (b. 1965, Bronx, New York). Bringing together works from both his celebrated and lesser-known series, the exhibition explores Harris' critical examination of identity and self-portraiture while tracing central themes and formal approaches in his work of the last thirty-five years. Harris's work engages with broad social and political dialogues while also addressing his own communities, personal struggles, sorrows, and self-illuminations. Organized in thematic clusters centered around singular constructions from his recently completed "Shadow Works" series, the exhibition expands upon these multiple throughlines.

Harris' "Shadow Works" offer focused views into his creative trajectory. In each, stretched Ghanaian textiles frame photographic prints and inset

personal mementos, including shells, shards of pottery, and locks of the artist's hair. The photographs in this series capture compositions built through careful accumulation: collages that include images of earlier artworks, reference materials, and personal notes and snapshots sourced from Harris's archives and journals. As in his large, wall-mounted installation *Obsessão II* (2017), the artist mines the past to address the present, revisiting and extending conversations sparked by his earliest artworks and relationships. In doing so, he engages in a constant reexamination and recentering: constructing meaning, articulating legacy, and finding clarity in works made from many sifted layers.

Lyle Ashton Harris: *Our first and last love* is co-organized by the Queens Museum and the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University and is co-curated by Lauren Haynes, former Director of Curatorial Affairs and Programs, Queens Museum, and Caitlin Julia Rubin, Associate Curator, Rose Art Museum.

Audio descriptions narrated by Sarah Cho, Assistant Curator, can be found on the Queens Museum Digital Guide, available for free on the Bloomberg Connects App.

This exhibition was produced in cooperation with the Queens Museum team: Lindsey Berfond, Hayley Blackstone, Sarah Cho, Gianina Enriquez, Catherine Grau, Mayisha Hassan, Hitomi Iwasaki, Adrienne Koteen, Lynn Maliszewski, Gabriela Peralta, Aaron Strauss, Heryte T. Tequame, and Tiffany Tong; Queens Museum fabricators and preparators: Keith O. Anderson, Max Bell, Noemi Bilger, Jackson Denahy, Brittany Hayden, Magnus Gitt Henderson, Natalya Kornblum Laudi, Clare Koury, Martin Kramer, Samantha Lasko, Juyon Lee, and Mallie Sanford; and EcoManagement LLC: Dilan Cheavacchi, Nolan Dolaher, Mark Power, and Chad Stayrook.

Lyle Ashton Harris wishes to thank Tommy Gear, Agnes Gund, Benjamin Hsu, Gregory R. Miller,

Senam Okudzeto, James Powell, Ryan Rusiecki,
and the staff of the Queens Museum.

Lyle Ashton Harris: Our first and last love is made possible in part by lead support from the Ford Foundation, the Teiger Foundation, Agnes Gund, and Noel Kirnon. Additional support is provided by the Queens Museum Exhibitions Circle.

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Artist-selected ephemera, 1961–2001

Collection of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:
101

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Maine #1, 1987

Gelatin silver print

Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Blake Byrne (A.B.'57), in honor of Raymond D. Nasher.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
102

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Maine #2, 1987

Gelatin silver print

Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Blake Byrne (A.B.'57), in honor of Raymond D. Nasher.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
103

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Americas (Triptych), 1987–88

Gelatin silver prints

Edition 5 of 6

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
104

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Ecstasy #1, 1987

Gelatin silver print

AP 1, Edition of 5, 2APs

Collection of Eileen Harris Norton



Bloomberg Connects Number:
105

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Ecstasy #2, 1987

Gelatin silver print

Edition 4 of 5

Courtesy of Kevin Walz



Bloomberg Connects Number:
106

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled #3, 1987

Gelatin silver print

Edition 1 of 5

Collection of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:
107

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

I Long for the Relationship We Used To Have....,

1990

Duraflex print

Edition 3 of 6

Robert F. Reid-Pharr, Brooklyn, New York

After his years as an undergraduate at Wesleyan University, Harris entered the MFA program at the California Institute of the Arts in 1988. This work, created during Harris' time as a graduate student and presented as a projection as part of his thesis exhibition, speaks to the assumptions and biases he faced from both his peers and professors as one of the program's few students of color. The defiant and revelatory tone of Harris' autobiographical text was spurred by a week-long workshop he took with bell hooks during his first semester, based on her book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*

(1988). As Harris explains, meeting hooks— who would become a close friend—changed both his life and his way of thinking, empowering him to speak from his own voice and to challenge the authority and opinions of others.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
108

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Excerpt from The Secret Life of a Snow Queen,
1990

Mixed media

Collection of the artist

One of Harris' earliest wall-mounted collages, this work is an excerpt from a larger installation presented as part of his MFA thesis exhibition at the California Institute of the Arts.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
109

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Our First and Last Love Is Self Love, 1993

Ruby red neon

Edition 1 of 2

Collection of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:
110

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

*Brotherhood, Crossroads and Etcetera #2 [in
collaboration with Thomas Allen Harris],*
1994

Polaroid

Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke
University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Blake
Byrne, A.B. '57.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
111

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Saint Michael Stewart, 1994

Polaroid

Collection of the artist

Wearing the uniform of a New York City police officer and a full face of makeup, Harris levels a commanding stare at his camera's lens. Though a self-portrait, the work is named after Michael Stewart, a young Black man who died while in police custody at the age of twenty-five. Stewart, an aspiring artist and model, was arrested for writing on the wall of a New York City subway station in September 1983. Hours after his detainment, he was admitted in a battered and comatose state to Bellevue Hospital, where he died thirteen days later. Stewart's death sparked debate about police brutality. At an eventual trial, all six indicted officers were acquitted by an all-white jury.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
112

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Venus Hottentot 2000 [in collaboration with Renee Cox], 1994

Polaroid

Courtesy of Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn

In this collaborative portrait created with Harris, the artist Renee Cox wears armor-like prosthetics that accentuate her breasts and buttocks. Both her pose and the title of this work reference the legacy of Saartjie Baartman (c. 1789–1815), a Black woman from South Africa's Eastern Cape. Baartman was born with the condition steatopygia, which results in an accumulation of fat on the bottom and thighs. In 1810, Baartman was brought by a British ship surgeon and Dutch showman to Europe, where she was placed in performative shows and displayed as a curiosity in venues such as London's Piccadilly Circus. Her promoters proclaimed her to be the

“Hottentot Venus,” adopting the derogatory Dutch term hottentot, used to describe the Khoikhoi and San peoples, who together make up the Khoisan tribe. Adding to the horrors of her treatment and objectification during her lifetime, following her death Baartman’s genitals, brain, and skeleton, as well as a postmortem body cast were displayed in Paris, first at the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle and later at the Musée de l’Homme [Museum of Natural History, and the Museum of Mankind, respectively], where they remained on view until the mid-1970s.

Venus Hottentot 2000 was made the same year that Nelson Mandela, newly elected as the president of South Africa, asked for the repatriation of Baartman’s remains from France—a request that was finally fulfilled in 2002. Harris’ and Cox’s homage to Baartman presents a woman of fierce confidence, and—with a title that looks toward the turn of a new century—a figure that seems to speak to the future, as well as the past.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
113

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

DDDDD, 1996

Chromogenic print and gold leaf paint

Collection of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:
114

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Oak Bluffs) from the series “The Watering Hole”, 1996

Duraflex print

Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Gift of Blake Byrne, A.B. '57.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
115

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Procession), 1998

Cibachrome print

Collection of Gregory R. Miller



Bloomberg Connects Number:
116

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Cups), 1998

Dye sublimation print on aluminum

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
117

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Pre-Election Self Portrait Commission),
2000

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper

Edition 6 of 10

Hort Family Collection



Bloomberg Connects Number:
118

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Billie, 2002

Polaroid

Courtesy of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:
119

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Blue #1) and Untitled (Blue #2), 2002

Polaroid diptych

Courtesy of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:
120

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Azul #4), 2002

Polaroid

Courtesy of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:

121

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Cape Coast), 2008

Installation with video projection on pigment-printed silk organza

Editions 3 of 3, 1AP

8 min 45 sec

Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art; gift of the artist and CRG Gallery.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
202

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Deceivers and Money Boys, 2013

Pigment print on canvas mounted on aluminum

Edition 2 of 3

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
122

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Yellow Grid), 2014

Archival pigment on Kozo paper

AP 1, Edition of 3, 2APs

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
123

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

For Tommy, 2016

Two-channel video

Edition of 3, 2AP

77 min

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
124

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Obsessão II, 2017

Mixed-media collage on panel

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

Harris' "Blow Up" series (2004–2019) is a precursor to his "Shadow Works." Like the Shadow constructions, the Blow Up *Obsessão II* was made following Harris' 2013 rediscovery of photographs from his Ektachrome Archive in storage. These images feature friends, lovers, and cultural icons from the late 1980s and early '90s, among them Renee Cox, bell hooks, Isaac Julien, Faith Ringgold, and Iké Udé, as well as individuals—including Essex Hemphill and Marlon Riggs—whose lives were cut short by AIDS.

A number of images from the archive are reproduced within this wall-mounted collage, mixed alongside stills from Harris' video works,

documentation of his journals, scrawled sticky notes, news articles and headlines, and translucent segments of the colored photographic gels used in his studio practice. The repetition of certain elements, reproduced at different scales and using a variety of materials, map pathways across the works' layered surface. Much like Harris' "Shadow Works," *Obsessão II* intertwines the very personal with the public: bearing witness to the losses of the past within the space of the present and giving shape to a narrative that is both intimate and collective.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
125

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Self-Portrait, Rome, 1992, 2017

Chromogenic print

Edition 3 of 3

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
126

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Red Shadow), 2017

Ghanaian cloth, dye sublimation prints,
and spray paint

Private Collection, Michigan, Courtesy of David
Castillo.

Untitled (Red Shadow), Harris' first completed Shadow Work, demonstrates the combination of materials and processes that define this series. The work's component prints utilize dye sublimation, a heat-based printing process in which the inked lines of photographed images are infused into aluminum panels. This diptych displays a sight familiar within Harris' studio practice: a wall-mounted collage of images drawn from his archive of news clippings, handwritten notes, and photographs, some of which feature in prior artworks. As in the subsequent "Shadow Works," these prints are set within the field of a Ghanaian textile's block-printed pattern, one of

the many fabrics Harris acquired during the seven years he lived and taught in Ghana (2005–2012).

Harris has long played with both the gestural and generative openness of collage and the more controlled formal concision of his photographed compositions. For Harris, *Red Shadow* demonstrates how the two might be brought together, pointing a way forward for the entire series. Rather than trying to distill everything into one image, Harris explains: “I began to think about the possibilities of maybe one or two or a few surfaces that were embedded together.”



Bloomberg Connects Number:
127

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Afropunk Odalisque, 2018

Dye sublimation print on aluminum

AP 1, Edition of 3, 2APs

Private Collection



Bloomberg Connects Number:
128

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Zamble at Land's End #2, 2018

Dye sublimation print on aluminum

Edition 1 of 3

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
129

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Anansi, 2019

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric, and acrylic paint

Jon Stryker and Slobodan Randjelović



Bloomberg Connects Number:
130

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Nyame Bekyere, 2019

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric and artist's ephemera

Collection of Noel E. D Kirnon. Promised gift to The Studio Museum in Harlem.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
201

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Queen Mother, 2019

Two dye sublimation prints and Ghanaian fabric
Collection of the artist

Speaking about the “Shadow Works,” Harris acknowledges the layered threads that connect these to his earlier practice—including continued concerns with subjectivity, self-portraiture, issues of gender and sexuality, and the material process of collage. This multivalent approach finds parallel in what Harris sees as an additional, overarching impulse in the “Shadow Works” series: a focus on presenting what he describes as a “nation of multiplicities, as opposed to the specificity of difference.”

Like the works hung near to it, *Queen Mother* shows Harris’ play with the fluidity of identity, as well as his

continued focus on interpretations of belonging and representations of racial and cultural otherness. Postcard reproductions of paintings and sculptures held in museum collections present a wide-ranging selection that includes Egyptian statues, Byzantine icons, Yoruba carvings, and Andy Warhol's 1963 portrait of Hollywood star Elizabeth Taylor. These static photographs of accessioned artworks stand in contrast to the nearby *Zamble at Land's End #2* (2018)—from a series in which Harris reanimates African masks from his family's collection—and are interspersed here with images of the artist's New York City studio and personal snapshots from the late 1980s and early '90s. Exploring the portrayal of subjects of both religious and cultural reverence as well as more intimate desires, *Queen Mother* also extends the sense of subversive performativity present in one of Harris' earliest works in the exhibition, *Americas (Triptych)* (1987-88).



Bloomberg Connects Number:
131

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Black Hummingbird #1), 2019

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric,
and artist's ephemera

Carmen Corrales Collection. Courtesy of David
Castillo.

The efforts of birds building a nest repeat across the grid of Ghanaian fabric framing this work's central paired prints. To this, Harris has added cuttings of his own hair—saved from his youth—as if offering them as potential materials for the birds' construction. The gesture speaks to a central throughline in Harris' practice: a yearning to build a vessel for the future from remnants of himself and of his past. Reflecting on all that he has gained and lost over the past decades, particularly due to the devastation of AIDS, Harris wonders: "what does it mean to have the wisdom of having lived through

that? Or ... having seen the devil and being able to tell the story ... to live through that and to take pleasure in play.” As his practice matures, Harris has revisited his earlier materials, artworks, and archives. New works, like the video *For Tommy* (made in 2016, yet filmed in the mid-1990s) and the photograph *Billie Dreaming in Blue* (taken in 2002, but not printed until 2021), reveal Harris’ clear-eyed, tender reflection on where and who he is, and all that has brought him to this point.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
132

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Antiquariato Busted, 2020

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric, and
artist ephemera

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
133

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Migration Times, 2020

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric, and artist's ephemera

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

Migration Times contains images and materials pulled from the New York Times, including a painting by Ghanaian artist Nicholas Wayo of the newspaper's front-page image on July 19, 1999: a coast guard vessel's search for remains following the crash of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s plane in the waters off Martha's Vineyard. To the left of this, Harris has pinned a letter to the editor—part of a section titled “New York’s Open Wound of Race.” The four letters in this section were written in response to coverage of the murder of Patrick Dorismond, a twenty-six-year-old Black man who was shot and killed by an undercover New York City

police officer on March 16, 2000 while waiting for a taxi in Midtown Manhattan, and the way that the then New York City mayor, Rudy Giuliani, responded. Harris' reference to both Kennedy's death and Dorismond's killing speaks to the inconsistencies of memorialization, and who is remembered and honored, within popular culture. Like many of Harris' "Shadow Works," *Migration Times* raises questions around notions of equivalence, and what it means for Harris to bring together seemingly disparate materials into cohesive and coherent works.

Harris' "Shadow Works" are a way for the artist to re-engage with earlier artworks as well as prior moments in his life, speaking to his interest in and development of archives of his own. What does it mean for Harris to return to these references after more than two decades? As viewers, they give us the opportunity to see Harris' shifting understanding of his practice, and how his relationship to these materials continues to take flight and change course

through both the distance and accumulation of years.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
134

<https://app.bloomberconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Oracle, 2020

Two dye sublimation prints, Kente cloth, and artist's ephemera

Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo

Oracle's photographed collage contains pinned photographs of individuals targeted because of their ethnicity, race, and sexuality, including Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon, who was killed in the 2016 mass shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida; and Lindon Barrett, a literary and cultural theorist and professor of queer and African studies at the University of California at Irvine, who was murdered by a male acquaintance in 2008. A sheet of white paper displays in miniature the nine panels of Harris' 1996 work *The Watering Hole*, created in response to the crimes of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, who gruesomely abused and killed seventeen men and boys before his arrest in 1991.

Dahmer, a white man, found many of his victims—most of whom were young men of color—in or near to gay meeting places. Like the nearby work *Deceivers and Money Boys* (2013), Oracle highlights the threat of violence that continues to haunt queer individuals today, and the ways in which this violence often accompanies the vulnerability of intimacy.

Mixing these images alongside photos of his own lovers, partners, and romantic obsessions, Harris hints at how all forms of desire can be dangerous. As he explains, he is most interested in the less blatant—but equally hazardous—ways in which we are “all implicated in the consumption of the other.”



Bloomberg Connects Number:
135

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Succession, 2020

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric, and artist's ephemera

Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Mortimer and Sara Hays Acquisition Fund, 2023.4

Even as a teenager, Harris moved through the world with a camera in hand. He credits his impulse to document in part to the example of his grandfather, Albert Johnson Jr., who produced several thousand slides capturing everyday moments in life of his family and the congregation of the historic First African Methodist Episcopal Bethel Church in Harlem, to which generations of his family belonged, and in which he was closely involved. *Succession* includes an image from Johnson's archive in which an infant Lyle Ashton Harris sits on the lap of his

father, with Lyle's brother, Thomas Allen Harris, beside them.

Succession, along with other works in this section, explores the complexity of defining one's own image in relation to the inherited ties of family and of history. Like his grandfather before him, Harris viewed his own photographs as a means of locating and conveying a new sense of self and of collective belonging. A number of these images, taken between the late 1980s and early 2000s, form the basis of Harris' own Ektachrome Archive: a trove of images documenting Black artistic, radical, and queer communities to which the artist belonged.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
136

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Yamantaka, 2020

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric, and artist's ephemera

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

Harris has created self-portraits throughout his career. In some, he stands in for another; in other photographs, he is clearly himself. As Harris explains: “I have always been a self-portrait, auto-portrait, autobiographical artist, if you will, but as the late poet, and a dear friend, Essex Hemphill said, it was less about self-portrait or autobiography, but more about using self-representation and the figure as a way to execute or to employ various experiments. And what could be more familiar, or more convenient, than using the self?”

Yamantaka's central, repeated image is a detail of one of these self-portraits, commissioned by the New York Times in the lead-up to the 2000 presidential election. In the full photograph—hung nearby—Harris presents himself in handcuffs with the word “Nigga” tattooed across his torso. For Harris, the image marks the first time that he used self-portraiture to truly depict himself, without taking on the role of a character or someone else. Harris’ use of the performative self-portrait underscores the dual power and harm of representation. It is a format in which he both reveals himself and embodies those with whom he identifies, many of whom have been erased from dominant narratives, or shown only within the frame of an othering and constraining gaze. Being forced to hide and contain who you are may also be experienced as a form of violence.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
137

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Billie Dreaming in Blue, 2021

Dye sublimation print on aluminum

Edition 2 of 5

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
203

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Triptych #1, Accra 2007), 2023

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
138

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Untitled (Triptych #2, Accra 2007), 2023

Gelatin silver print

Collection of the artist



Bloomberg Connects Number:
139

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3lb>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

The Gold Standard II, 2019

Two dye sublimation prints, Ghanaian fabric, and artist's ephemera

Private Collection, Courtesy of David Castillo.

The Gold Standard II anchors a section of works focused on the intertwining of intimacy and violence, particularly within the sphere of obsessive desire. Included in this section are three black-and-white photographs from 1987, made while Harris was an undergraduate at Wesleyan University. Seeming to barely contain the movements and energies of the figure they picture, these images showcase a complex emotional interiority that continues to be present within Harris' work today.

The materials Harris uses in his “Shadow Works” include artworks and images he has created himself, texts and mementos from people he holds dear, and magazine and newspaper clippings, many of which he returns to time and again. A photograph of his childhood friend Gasper, taken by Harris after his first photography class at Wesleyan, falls into this category. The image, which appears in *The Gold Standard II*’s right-hand print, recurs throughout the “Shadow Works” series. For Harris, Gasper’s likeness represents a certain archetype of Black urban and masculine beauty that was key during that period of his life. But the photograph’s repeated use is less tied to Gasper than to the moment the image symbolized, transporting Harris back to this time and speaking to the important and at times obsessive nature of his close friendships.



Bloomberg Connects Number:
140

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>

Lyle Ashton Harris

b. Bronx, NY, 1965

Intercession #2, 2020

Dye sublimation print and Ghanaian fabric

Collection of Miyoung Lee and Neil Simpkins, New York



Bloomberg Connects Number:
141

<https://app.bloombergconnects.org/gMWJXy1J3Ib>